

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

CONTENTS

NOVELETTE

- THE VERY HARD SELL *by Helen Nielsen* 104

SHORT STORIES

- HOMICIDE ONLY KNOCKS ONCE *by Henry Slesar* 2
- BLOOD RED WINE *by Donald Martin* 12
- SILKY COLLINS FINDS AN ANGLE ON SOME SQUARES *by Joe Mackey* 18
- WHICH ONE'S THE GUILTY ONE? *by Edward Wellen* 30
- WONDERFUL, WONDERFUL VIOLENCE *by Donald Honig* 36
- ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN *by Mark Mallory* 46
- WE'RE REALLY NOT THAT KIND OF PEOPLE *by Samuel W. Taylor* 52
- I HAD A HUNCH, AND . . . *by Talmage Powell* 66
- CORONER'S JURY *by O. H. Leslie* 76
- ✓ THE \$5,000 GETAWAY *by Jack Ritchie* 80
- NOT SO DEEP AS A GRAVE *by Richard Hardwick*... 92
- MURDERS ARE SUCH A NUISANCE *by Robert Plate* 97

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O'HANLON and I were in the guard's dining room having a cup of coffee with Lieutenant Farley before going on duty.

"It's impossible," Farley said.

I lit a cigar. "You mean it hasn't been done."

He shook his head. "I mean it's impossible. Nobody ever got off this rock unless we let him."

"What about Hilliard?"

Farley snorted. "Maybe he got off, but what good did it do him? His little wooden flippers didn't do much to improve his swimming. The current and the cold finished him and he drowned."

I grinned slightly. "For two weeks, until we found his body, we thought he made it."

"Not me," Farley snapped. "I would have bet plenty against it."

O'Hanlon looked pained, the way he always does when I argue with the Lieutenant.

I watched a fleck of cigar ash drop to the floor. "It's only a mile and a half across the bay to the city. Or about two and a half to the point. A good swimmer shouldn't have trouble."

"There's the fog and the cold, Regan," Farley said. "Don't forget about them. And the current is tricky and strong."

"That's what the newspapers say."

Farley pounded the table. "That's what I say too. I been here since the place opened and I know what I'm talking about."

I rolled the cigar in my mouth. "I read about Henderson and Wallace in thirty-seven. Their bodies were never found. Some people like to think that they crawled out of the bay on the other side and went on to a happy life in South America."

Farley's voice rose. "Their

THE \$5,000 GETAWAY

by Jack Ritchie

Bars do not a prison make—not in themselves they don't. Walls, floors and ceilings are also sine qua non. Now, the deluxe model features a cold body of water surrounding the entire edifice. And it is also equipped with convicts who are all quite eager to escape.



bodies were carried out to sea.

I rubbed my jaw. "We'll never know."

Farley glared at me. "We never heard a thing about them."

I shrugged. "You'd hardly expect them to send the warden a Christmas card every year."

O'Hanlon glanced at his watch. "It's nearly four, Regan. Time for us to go."

He sighed as we left the room. "You're just a rookie guard, Regan. He's the Lieutenant. It isn't smart to make him sore."

I knocked the light off my cigar when we reached the cell house. The gate keeper waited while the armory officer checked us through his vision panel.

O'Hanlon's eyes took in the tool steel bars. "Farley's right. Nobody gets off this place and lives."

The armory officer pressed his buzzer and the shield pulled off the lock.

"People sure go through a lot of trouble to get out of some places," O'Hanlon said. "Like a break I read about in Kansas City. This



guy was in a cell on the sixth floor of the police station waiting to go to trial. He'd been there a couple of months and then one night he sawed through the window bars and climbed down the side of the building."

Inside the first gate we waited until the keeper opened the door.

"It seemed like something impossible," O'Hanlon said. "But when the police got him back later, he told them how he'd done it. For six weeks he practiced in his cell for hours every day strengthening his fingers with exercises. Finally, he could actually support the full weight of his body for over a half an hour with just his fingertips. He went down the side of that building just that way, with his fingertips and using every crack and joint for a hold."

We relieved Gomez and Morgan in Cell Block C.

The late afternoon sun made the place bright and two orderlies were polishing Broadway between the three-tiered cells. One of them was Turpin.

The rest of the men were at the shops and the cell doors were all open. I walked along the shelves, glancing inside each cell. Some were plain and bare, with no more than the bed, the toilet bowl, the sink and fountain, and others looked like miniature law offices, art studios, or chapels, depending on the nature of the men who occupied them.

I stopped at Turpin's cell on the second tier and went inside. It was one of the plain ones, not a thing that wasn't issued, except for Volume 18 of the library's encyclopedia. I riffled through the pages, and the book still opened to the same place, the same subject. The pages were a little grimy. Turpin really should have memorized that section by now. The article was short and clear.

When I came out of his cell, Turpin was looking up. He went back to polishing the floor.

During the break for the orderlies, I went down to talk to him. "Not smoking, Turpin?"

"No, sir. I gave it up."

"Now I wish I could do that," I said. "Tobacco's bad for the wind."

There was the faintest flicker in his eyes. "Yes, sir."

I looked through the incurved bars at the window to where buoys marked the forbidden zone two hundred yards off shore. "This is a lot better than Dog Block, isn't it, Turpin?"

His tone was expressionless. "Yes, sir."

"At least you get more sun and air," I said. "The walls are a little farther apart and you get a chance for exercise." I studied him. "Just be a good boy and you might get even more sun and air. Maybe a job with the garbage crew or the wharf gang."

"I think I'd like that, sir."

I looked out at the bay again. "Look at all that water, Turpin. I'll bet you never saw anything like that in Arizona. That's where you were born and raised, isn't it?"

His eyes were on the bay. "Yes, sir."

"Nice place," I said. "But dry." I looked back at him. "I'm a little worried about you, Turpin."

He was startled. "Why, sir?"

"Your hour in the recreation yard," I said. "I hear that all you do is trot around the place."

"Just working off steam, sir."

"Good," I said. "Real healthy. Keeps you in condition." I pursed my lips. "You ought to keep your mind occupied too, Turpin. Take correspondence courses and stuff like that."

"I'll think about it, sir."

"We got a guy here who made himself a world authority on canary birds," I said. "Just imagine that. From books. And some of the boys in here have been making out so many writs and petitions that they know more about law than most lawyers." I smiled slightly. "A man can do almost anything if he sets his mind to it."

I walked back down the hall and joined O'Hanlon.

He watched Turpin. "That man used to give us a lot of trouble, but it looks like he's tamed."

"He doesn't care much for the

isolation cells or solitary," I said. "Not much opportunity there."

O'Hanlon grinned. "He didn't much want to come to this rock in the first place. He made a break for it before the launch even got here."

I looked back down the corridor at Turpin. "That right?"

"It was before you came here, Regan. About three years ago when Farley was bringing him here from the mainland, he tried to get away. Just as the boat pulled away, he slipped his cuffs and made a jump back for the dock."

O'Hanlon chuckled. "I guess he waited a second too long because he landed in the water instead of on the dock. Went down like a stone. If Farley hadn't fished him out, he would have drowned."

At five-thirty, the prisoners were marched from the dining hall into the cell block. After the count bell, we locked them up for the night.

At eight, Lieutenant Farley came around to see how things were. He looked down the lines of closed cell doors. "Quiet," he said. "Just like always."

I covered my smile. "Not like always. This place can get noisy. Like the time seven were killed."

He scowled. "But nobody got out of the cell blocks."

"That's right," I said. "This isn't the place to try anything."

"Maximum security," Farley said. "Minimum privilege. No radios or newspapers. Correspond-

ence and visiting restricted. No commissary. And the silence system."

"Not much to live for."

He grunted. "But only one ever took the easy way out. Everybody likes to live, no matter how hard things can get."

I looked up toward the skylights in the cell block. "I keep wondering what happened to Henderson and Wallace."

Farley scowled. "Stop wondering. The sharks chewed them up twenty years ago."

"We just don't know. Maybe they do their thinking in Spanish now."

Farley glared at me.

I smiled a little. "Did you know that a year before this became a Federal pen, two women swam out here from the city, bucking those awful currents, went all around the island, and back to the mainland. Did you ever hear about it?"

Farley's face was mottled. "Sure I heard about it. But I don't believe it. And if they did, I'll bet they were like those professionals. Like the ones who swim that channel over in Europe."

"It takes a lot of practice to do something like that."

He slapped the railing and grinned. "That's it, Regan. Hours and hours of practice. Years maybe. And where are these cons going to practice swimming? We ain't got a pool here, you know."

"That's right, Lieutenant," I said. "No pool."

Farley was still pleased. "Nobody here could make it across."

I nodded. "Especially if he couldn't swim in the first place."

He patted my shoulder. "Let me know if you see anybody in the water."

I made my round of the tiers at eight-thirty instead of nine-fifteen that night. On the second shelf I walked softly and stopped in front of Turpin's cell.

He was doing pushups.

They were easy for him now. He wasn't breathing hard at all.

I watched the number on his back, 1108-AZ, until I counted fifty push-ups and then I made a noise with my heel.

Turpin stopped and got to his feet slowly.

"Letting off steam?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. Letting off more steam."

"That's fine," I said. "Real intelligent."

On Tuesday, after the noon meal, O'Hanlon and I went down to the beach for our monthly target practice. I scored a 197 with the .45 automatic.

O'Hanlon shook his head. "How come you're so good with that thing?"

"I put in an hour a day at it."

He thought that over. "You don't get a bit more practice than the rest of us. Once a month we

all come down here and fire twenty rounds."

"But I still put in an hour a day."

He regarded me skeptically. "The government don't give you that many free bullets."

I lifted my empty automatic in line with the target, expelled my breath, and squeezed the trigger. "That's the way I practice, Pete. I don't need bullets."

O'Hanlon was dubious. "It can't be as good as the real thing."

"Some people think it's better," I said. "And it works."

We walked over to the truck and waited for the others to finish on the range.

"Maybe you got something," O'Hanlon said after awhile. "I once saw a movie short where some diving coach was training a couple of girls for the Olympics. Instead of using a pool, he had them jump off a springboard, do their twists, and land feet first in a pit of sand. They didn't need water at all."

Three weeks later, the deputy warden assigned Turpin to the wharf gang. That meant that every morning, Turpin and a half a dozen other prisoners unloaded the supply boat at the dock.

That evening when I made my nine-fifteen tour everything was the way it was supposed to be; the single fifty watt bulb burning in

every cell and the prisoners in their bunks. Including Turpin.

A half an hour later I went up to the second tier again, this time on tip-toe.

Turpin was on the floor, face down. He was kicking his legs rhythmically, toes pointed.

When he knew I was there, he stopped and got to his feet.

I smiled. "Sick?"

He licked his lips. "No, sir."

"I thought you might be having convulsions."

"No, sir."

I kept smiling. "Maybe I ought to get the medical orderly?"

"No, sir. I feel all right."

"Then why aren't you in your bunk?"

He looked worried. "You're not going to put me on report?"

"I don't know," I said. "Not if you're sick. I don't like to be hard on anybody."

He nodded quickly. "Sort of sick, sir. Stiff muscles. I was just loosening them up so that I could get some sleep."

I nodded. "How do you like your new job?"

"Just fine, sir."

"I notice you got a little sunburn. A few more nice days like this and you ought to be able to get yourself a tan."

"Yes, sir."

"We get a lot of nice weather here," I said. "Bright, sunny, and clear. Most people seem to think we have nothing but fog."

Turpin said nothing.

"But when we get fog," I said, "we really get it. Can't see your hand in front of your face."

A week later at two in the afternoon, I was in my quarters when the siren began its two minute wail. I went to the window and cursed softly. He can't be that much of a fool, I thought fiercely. This isn't the time. There isn't enough fog and what there is will clear up soon.

Along with the other guards not on duty, I reported to the armory where I was issued a rifle. Lieutenant Farley got the launch keys from the board and we began making our way to our emergency stations down at the dock.

"It's Will Stacey," Farley said.

I could feel the tension leaving me. "How did he do it?"

"Sawed his way through one of the bars in the laundry and managed to squeeze through," Farley said. "The laundry officer figures he hasn't got more than a fifteen minute start, but that was enough for him to scale the wall and get through the cyclone fence and barbed wire on top. The tower man didn't see him because a patch of fog moved in. As far as we know, Stacey was the only one who made the break, but we'll be certain after we take a count."

On the way down to the dock, we passed the men being marched

from the shop building back to the cell blocks. The wharf gang's truck came through the sally-gate. Turpin was on one of the side seats in the bed and he was watching the fog thoughtfully.

I grinned and almost waved to him.

At the dock, I cast off the lines and Farley eased the boat into the bay. The fog was wispy and drifting. Clear spots were beginning to appear.

"If he decided to swim," Farley said, "he can't be out too far."

We cruised out almost to the mainland and then turned and made our way slowly back to the island, sweeping far to the right and left as we went.

Farley grinned. "You look thoughtful, Regan."

"I was a little surprised," I said. "I didn't think anybody would try it at this time of the year."

"I'm never surprised," Farley said. "I know they can't make it, but I'm never surprised when they try. Most of them got nothing to lose but their lives."

We turned up our coat collars against the chill breeze and kept our eyes on the water.

Inside of half an hour we found Stacey floundering in the water and Farley turned the wheel toward him.

I stood up with the rifle, but O'Hanlon chuckled. "There's no fight in him, Regan. Put that thing down and save the man."

Stacey was taking desperate gulps of air when we got to him and his eyes were wide. He was just about dead exhausted.

I pulled him aboard and slipped the cuffs over his wrist.

Stacey's lips were blue and he shivered uncontrollably.

Farley felt generous. "Give the fool a blanket and a cigarette."

After he radioed the island, Farley watched Stacey take deep puffs of the smoke. "You were a damn fool, boy."

Stacey kept his eyes on the floorboards. "I didn't count on the fog lifting."

Farley laughed. "You were glad to see us. You didn't get one quarter of the way across and you were about to come to pieces."

Stacey was silent for a few seconds, then a tired grimace came to his lips. "Drowning is a terrible way to die," he said softly.

Farley winked at me. "The trouble with Stacey is that he's out of condition. He needs more practice in our swimming pool. A couple of hours a day. I'll see if I can arrange it."

A detail of guards met us at the dock and took Stacey back up the hill for a medical examination and dry clothes. After questioning, he would be put in one of the solitary cells in Dog Block.

Farley and I went to the mess hall for some coffee.

He chuckled. "Disappointed, Regan?"

I shrugged. "Why should I be disappointed?"

He grinned. "I just thought you might be."

I sipped my coffee. "If the fog hadn't lifted, a good swimmer would have made it."

Irritation came to his face. "I'd bet a thousand it can't be done."

"All right," I said quietly.

He glared at me. "All right, what?"

"I was just thinking," I said, "that if anybody gave me odds, say five to one, I'd be willing to put up a thousand that somebody will make it across within the next year."

Farley frowned. "You know what you're saying?"

I put a little more sugar in my coffee. "It would have to be kept quiet, a bet like that."

Farley watched me for a half a minute. Then his eyes went over the room. A couple of off-duty guards were drawing coffee from the urn at the far end of the hall. Otherwise the place was empty.

"I got the thousand," I said softly.

Farley watched the flame of his match as he lit a cigar. "Suppose somebody was stupid enough to make a crazy bet like that with you. How would anybody know whether a man made the swim or not? If he didn't make it, his body might be washed out to sea and never recovered. Like with Henderson and Wallace."

"I'd lose the bet," I said. "We'd have to know for certain that he made it."

Farley glanced at the guards again. "But suppose he did make it and then skipped off to South America. How would we know? He isn't likely to phone us."

"That's why I get the five to one odds," I said. "We'd have to know for sure. I'd be counting on the fact that he'd be seen on the mainland by responsible witnesses or that he'd be picked up by the police within a year." I put down the coffee cup. "But we'd be betting only on the fact that he did or didn't make a successful break from the rock. What happens after that doesn't matter."

Farley was thoughtful. "You're betting in the teeth of a lot of things."

"That's why I want the odds."

His eyes met mine. "Like you said, the whole thing would have to be kept quiet. The government wouldn't like to hear about it."

"There's one other thing I'd have to worry about," I said. "If I win, would I get paid?"

Farley's face got glowering red. "I never welshed on a bet in my life. Just be sure you got a thousand."

That evening I stopped in front of Turpin's cell.

He was sitting on the bunk, idly paging through a magazine.

"That's it," I said. "Improve your mind."

He looked up.

"Stacey should have done that," I said. "Spent his time improving his mind instead of trying to escape." I shook my head sadly. "He was plain stupid. Even if he had been able to go the distance, he should have made it his business to know about the fog."

Turpin waited.

"He should have figured it would clear up and we'd be waiting for him when it did. The fog's a tricky thing here. When it rolls in from the southwest you can bet it won't stay around long. It's different when it comes from the north."

Several days later Turpin came back from the wharf wringing wet.

The guard bringing the detail back to the cell block grinned. "Turpin got too close to the edge of the dock and fell off."

I looked at one of the windows. The day was bright and clear. "How was the water, Turpin?"

There was no expression on his face, but there was a gleam of what might have been triumph in his eyes. "It was a little cold, sir."

I talked to the guard. "Going to put that on report?"

He looked surprised. "What for? It was just a little accident."

"Just wondering," I said. "Did

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you have any trouble fishing him out?"

He shook his head. "No. It was only a few feet from the dock. Turpin swam back himself, grinning like a monkey."

In September, Turpin was transferred to the garbage crew. It was still outside work. Every afternoon he was down at the incinerators at the beach.

And the fog weather began.

I was in my room in the guard's quarters when I saw the first heavy concentration coming from the northwest—from the sea. This would be the time he would try it. I could almost feel that.

The siren cut through the fog at two-thirty. I put my cigar in the ashtray and made my way to the armory.

Lieutenant Farley was assigning the search details. "This time it's Turpin. The fog came down on the garbage gang so fast that the guard was caught by surprise. He started heading the prisoners to the truck, but Turpin slipped away and disappeared into the fog."

Farley grinned at me. "Relax. You're not winning any bet today. I happen to know for a fact that Turpin can't swim a stroke."

I shrugged. "Then why would he run away?"

Farley chuckled. "He lost his head when he saw a chance. He wasn't thinking. Now the best he

can do is to hide out in some cave or corner of this island for a couple of days and hope that we'll think he's gone out and drowned himself. He probably figures that when we stop looking for him, he can smuggle himself aboard the supply boat."

I pocketed two clips of ammunition. "Then it won't be much good to take out the launch?"

Farley showed his teeth again. "No good at all. But we take it out just the same. That's our job."

A half a dozen more guards reported and Farley began giving them instructions.

I picked the launch keys off the board. "I'll wait for you down at the dock."

Outside, it was like walking through smoke. Every object was shrouded and strange, and the trip down to the dock took me almost fifteen minutes.

I checked the boat compass and headed the launch northeast, out into the bay. The fog misted my face and nothing was visible more than a few feet beyond the bow.

I could imagine what Farley would say when I got back.

"Why the hell didn't you wait for me?"

"I'm sorry, Lieutenant. But I thought I heard something out in the water."

Farley would probably grin. "You got some imagination. Why didn't you come back when you found he wasn't out there?"

I would look embarrassed. "I couldn't find the dock, Lieutenant. The fog was too thick."

"And what about the radio?" Farley would demand. "Why didn't you get in touch with us?"

"But the radio doesn't work, Lieutenant."

Now I kept the launch going until I was about half way across the bay and a few miles north. Then I cut the motor and let the boat drift.

I wouldn't have been able to do that if Farley were with me. We'd be cruising back and forth and there would be a chance that we might find Turpin.

I didn't want that.

I disconnected a lead-in wire on the radio and sat down to wait. The current would bring me back near the island in a few hours.

The sea was calm, with just enough swelling to let you know that it was still alive. I tried to figure how long it would take a man to swim a mile and a half. It was difficult to know how good all of Turpin's practice had made him.

The time passed slowly. It was silent except for the breathing of the ocean and the faint fog horn of the coast guard boat searching near the mainland.

The cold and damp began to get into my bones after an hour. I checked my watch and decided to wait at least another half an hour before I started the motor and went back to the island.

And then I heard the sound, muffled in the distance.

I held my breath as it came again.

It was the hoarse cry of a man calling for help.

I cursed softly. Turpin had got himself lost in the fog. Instead of going straight, he had veered to the left. He was swimming parallel to the coast.

His calls were closer now, desperate in the emptiness.

I shook my head savagely. If he drowned here, the current would carry his body back to the island. It would be found in a few days, a week or two.

I started the motor and kept the launch as slow as possible while I searched. It was hard work, but I kept at it, shutting off the power now and then to listen.

When I found Turpin he was treading water and taking deep gasps for air.

His eyes met mine and I saw the same thing that I'd seen in Stacey's when we picked him up. There was defeat because his try had failed and relief because he would soon be out of the water.

I pulled him aboard and put him in the stern.

His face was dead white and he shivered with cold. I tossed him a blanket and watched him huddle inside it.

Turpin's teeth chattered. "How close did I get?"

"Not close at all," I said. "You

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were headed straight for Seattle.”
Turpin sighed. “I was in the water a long, long time.”

“An hour and a half,” I said.
“I could have made it,” he said softly. “If only I’d kept going straight. You knew what I was going to do didn’t you?”

I grinned, but said nothing.
“You were waiting for me to make the break. You wanted a little fun to fight the dullness of life. You knew what I was going to do, and where, and when. Maybe you even wanted to use that rifle.”

I ignored what he’d said. I studied him for half a minute, thinking it out. Then I searched through my pockets until I found an old letter. I carefully tore off a blank section at the bottom of one page. It would have to do.

I handed it to Turpin and gave him my fountain pen. “I want you to write the warden a little note.”

His mouth gaped slightly.
“Go ahead,” I snapped. “Write what I tell you.”

He hesitated and then shrugged.
“Dear Warden,” I said. “It was a cold swim, but it was worth it.”

Turpin looked up, trying to figure it out. Then he shook his head, moved the pen across the paper.

“Now wish him a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.”

Turpin’s mouth dropped again.

I glared at him. “Write it and sign your name.”

He did what he was told.

I took the paper from him and examined it. The handwriting made it good enough, but I wanted more. “Put your fingers in some of that grease on the floorboards and let’s have ten little fingerprints under your signature.”

When that was done, I folded the paper carefully and put it in my wallet. It was worth five thousand dollars to me.

“Stand up, Turpin,” I said. “And turn around.”

He got up wearily and turned.

I brought the rifle stock down hard on the back of his head and he dropped without a sound.

After I made sure that he was dead, I got the anchor from the bow locker and tied it to him.

I took the launch three miles west, out to sea, and dumped Turpin’s body overboard.

Then I lit a cigar, checked with the compass, and headed back for my chat with Farley.

In a month or two, when I got to the city on one of my days off, I’d mail Turpin’s note in a plain typed envelope.

The postmark ought to make news, and it would start all the world looking for the first man to escape from the rock.

